“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And behold there was a man named Zacchaeus... And he sought to see Jesus... and could not for the Press.”...Luke 19:1-3.

I am honored to be here but I don’t quite know why I was invited. I know nothing about Women’s colleges. I am interested in this regional American experiment in separate women’s education but don’t think I agree with it. I have three sons and no daughters, and I am not a public speaker. It occurred to me that maybe I was asked because you wouldn’t have to give me an honorary degree, but even that does not explain the mystery, for obviously that would apply to any other man.

Nevertheless, I am consoled by my own forgetfulness. I haven’t the faintest idea of who made my commencement address or what he said. I have a conviction about the world you are now entering and I want to talk about it. That conviction is that the major problems of our country are not technical problems, crying for more scientists and engineers, but moral problems and intellectual problems, and these problems, particularly the moral problems, have always been primarily the province of women.

There is a remarkable man in Washington. I would vote for him for President tomorrow and you never heard of him. His name is Merle Tuve. He is a brilliant scientist. He was primarily responsible for the invention of the proximity fuse during the last war. He is now Director of the Department of Terrestrial Magnetism at the Carnegie Institution of Washington. He made the point I am trying to make better than I can.

“If as a nation,” he said recently, “we are to meet successfully today’s challenges to many of the really basic elements of our culture...we must first of all raise our youngsters to know what they stand for, to recognize and cherish the simple and basic things amid all the seeming complexities of the modern world, to have faith and to act on it.

“Then after this we must equip them with the tools and the techniques of power. Knowledge is power and technology is power,...but the calm spiritual strength of the man who knows what he stands for, whose value system is the very fiber of his being, is the man who will successfully and constructively direct the uses of knowledge and the goals of technology. These are the men we need, not just more scientists and engineers.”
Now this, I think, is extremely useful. We are not in trouble as a nation today because our scientists or engineers have failed us but because our poets and writers and politicians and statesmen have failed us. We have raised enough military force to deter the enemy from attacking us with military arms. In this we have done better than the British and French in the critical years before the two world wars of this century. But we have failed to articulate our purposes, or to defend our society adequately in the realm of the mind and spirit.

It is an astonishing fact. This country was made by pamphleteers. It has spent more time, money and energy on the arts of public relations and the techniques of persuasion than all the other nations of the world combined. It has given the lie to the Marxist doctrine that Capitalism would destroy the power and living standards of the working man. It has created the highest standard of living of any national state in history, used its power with more restraint than any nation on earth, and shared its bounty with the defeated and disinherited all over the earth. Yet it is vilified everywhere for selfishness and materialism, and charged with plotting atomic war against half of mankind.

It is, of course, a monstrous calumny. It has come about partly because the Communists have spread this terrible libel. It has happened, in part, because people are always ready to believe the worst about the rich and powerful. It has been tolerated by a tongue-tied government in Washington that has isolated itself from the intellectual community of the nation. But it has also happened because those who have had the benefit of education have not used their talents adequately in explaining the true purposes of the nation. For every noble poem or essay or novel about the essential kindness, equality and fair-mindedness of the nation, we have had torrents of trash about brutality and wickedness of every vulgar kind and description.

The Founding Fathers said in the Declaration of Independence: “We declare these things to be self-evident…” and they went on to define them. We no longer define them, though the world no longer really believes they are self-evident, and sometimes I wonder whether we do ourselves.

If our major problems lie in the realm of the imponderables, in the world of the mind and spirit, in applying our noble heritage to the problems of today, is this any less the task of women than of men? If war is too serious a business to be left to soldiers, as Clemenceau suggested, then peace is too serious a business to be left to politicians. You do not need to wait for Summit Meetings, or for John Foster Dulles or some other man to deal with the problem. You can at least approach it from the viewpoint of personal responsibility.

There are few times in life when men and women have reasonably free choices. When we are very young, we are directed by our parents. When we are well-established, we are bound by the obligations of work and family. When we are old we are limited by the frailties of life. But there is a golden period, around the time of college
commencement, when we are comparatively free to choose what we will do with our lives.

We are never wholly free, of course. The element of accident is always present. In the midst of a social, economic, political and military revolution, when immense forces are sweeping the earth, it must often seem to young men and woman that they actually have very few free choices. But this need not be true. In our personal lives there are still many decisions that can be made, and if made wisely can change the whole meaning of life.

We can spend our lives on the things that vanish, or on the things that endure. We can use and nourish our education or let it wither. We can spend our lives among the mean or the noble. We can read to escape from life or to understand life. We can, as Whitney Griswold told the men of Yale yesterday, be spectators or doers. He quoted to them from the Bible, “Be ye doers of the world, not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

Sometimes one must be personal to be specific. My eldest son is at the University of Edinburgh. In discussing his career with him, I tried to make a point that I will repeat to you: There are some jobs that develop the best qualities in a person’s character, and some that develop the worst. A poor-paying job where you learn and use your energies on important things is better in the long run than a profitable, flashy job that tickles your vanity but contributes little of value to you or anybody else. Where will you learn and grow the most? Where will you make the greatest contribution in the best cause? These are always good questions, especially in one’s early Twenties.

In feminine terms, maybe this should be put in another way, for presumably, you are thinking less than men about careers. This does not invalidate the importance of conscious choice. The family is the unit of society that makes more sense today than any other. It always does in time of crisis. The task of teaching and ministering lies there as much as anywhere else, and again the choice is clear. The only difference between a bad teacher in the home and a bad teacher in the school is that the Mother-teacher twists her own brood.

If this point is true – namely, that we can make intelligent choices that enrich and give purpose to our lives – the second question arises: What kind of world are you going to live in?

I need not tell this generation that you will live in a period of change. Twenty-two years ago, when most of you were born, the population of this country was 128,429,000. Today it is over 174,000,000 - a gain of over 45 million, or more people than there are in France today. In your lifetime, there has never been a single year when there was not a war in progress somewhere. When you were born, we were an isolated nation. Today, we have political or military commitments with 43 different nations. These oblige us to defend, not only this hemisphere, but an area that stretches from the North Cape of Norway right through the heart of Europe along the line of the Elbe; thence eastward
across the whole of the Middle East, to Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and northward to the Philippines, Formosa and even on to the continent of Asia in South Korea.

Change, however, is nothing new. This college was founded during the Reconstruction Period after the Civil War. It is not as old as my own Mother and Father, and yet think of the changes that have taken place in this time: In 1880, shortly after the founding of Wellesley, the population of the United State was only 50,126,000. Since then it has increased almost three and a half times, and for most of this period the world has either been at war or struggling with the consequences of war.

It does not follow from this that you are going to live in a world of atomic war. We have learned some things. We have learned to warn the enemy in advance that any resort to war in areas essential to our security will bring us into the battle. We have removed the hope of easy and glittering prizes through war, which led to the two world wars of this century. We may see, before the end of the century, one vast war, probably between China and Russia, and we will probably see a catalogue of small wars. This means that you will be living in a world of clamorous headlines and noisy broadcasts, interspersed no doubt with singing commercials. But it is not a hopeless prospect, and does not justify a cheerless and depressed look on life.

After all, you are not the first generation to face great danger and change. When Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, Adam said to Eve, according to The New York Times, “We are certainly living in an age of transition.” Every generation has to break new ground. The only difference is that there are more changes now and this makes prophecy a little harder.

Nevertheless, we can be reasonably sure of some things. It will be a world of high taxation. It will probably be a world of slowly rising inflation.

Life expectancy will be longer. There will be more leisure. There will be more government interference and control over corporate and private lives of the country. There will be more need for intelligence and more opportunity for intelligence in useful work all over the world.

If all this is reasonable accurate, I think it is fair to make certain deductions about private life in such a world:

For example, in a world of high taxation and inflation, in a world where life expectancy will run into the 80s, the material approach to life – that is to say, a life devoted to the search for material things – makes even less sense than it did a generation ago. The more you make, the more the government will take away. The longer you live, the more important will be the things of the mind and spirit.

This, I think, is the great paradox of our time: the more things change the more important will be the old things that endure – devotion to family, fidelity to friendship,
love of country, personal identification with great and noble causes, improvement of the mind, enjoyment of the arts.

If it is to be a world without either total war or total peace, it is certain to be a world of constant controversy over men and issues. You can leave this to the professional politicians if you like, but I don’t think you’ll like what you get if you do.

Our basic problem in Washington today is that we are living in the world of the Jupiter C and trying to run it with attitudes and institutions which were beginning to become obsolete in days of the Model T. History has played a trick on America. We have put so much emphasis on personality rather than knowledge and wisdom that we have actually tried to substitute personality for leadership in the nation and the world.

Also, we have paid so much attention to the mastery of techniques rather than to the acquisition of wisdom, that most of the new candidates for the Presidency are little more than technicians and tacticians – political mechanics, in short.

It is a great pity but it is not surprising. A nation rewards what it admires and perpetuates what it rewards, and if we admire smiles and handshakes more than brains, or techniques more than substance and character, we need not be surprised if the personality boys and the political mechanics come to the top.

The trouble is that this is not good enough today and the hopeful thing is that it is still correctable if the intelligent people will stop complaining in their comfortable drawing rooms and get out and do something about it.

You would be surprised at the dent one intelligent girl can make on any party headquarters and how easy, in fact, it is to get aboard. Nothing is more casual than the way an American campaign for Congress or the Senate or even the Presidency is organized. It is strictly a last-minute scramble, put together in some vacant store, and almost always open for volunteers. Besides you might meet some other lonely reformer, and there is nothing like loving a man who loves lost-causes.

The important thing is to do something. The purpose of education originally was to serve virtue. Everybody can at least write letters to the editors. These columns in the newspapers do not have to be the monopoly of crack-pots, and professors explaining the panic of 1893. You can at least write protesting against the sack, or defend some poor wretch in Congress who wants to bring sanity to this unhappy planet before plunging off into outer space.

Ladies of the Graduating Class: I am trying to say that there is no conflict between the search for personal serenity and national security. It is hard to have the one without at least working for the other. The Russians have their party-line, but we have ours, educating ourselves to party in our own party lines. I scarcely think it is worth the trouble. Through education, we have been given the opportunity of service to our families, and our community, which now encircles the world. If we see this world in
terms of heroes and villains, in short and narrow terms, we will neither help the nation nor ourselves. It is only when we view it in historic terms and try to be part of it that we can be useful and at the same time achieve personal satisfaction.

So I congratulate you and suggest that the way to commence is to commence, and I do so with this last thought: I have often thought that we are not generous enough with our congratulations in some of the great occasions of life, notably on birthdays and commencements. The first twenty years of life are very strange: In the first ten, we are often ashamed of our children and in the second ten they are often ashamed of us. It is only at Commencement that we have a chance to be proud all around. Therefore I congratulate the parents of the graduates as well as the graduates themselves.